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DOCUMENTS

JAMES MADISON'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NEGRO

Like most of the Revolutionary leaders, James Madison, moved by the social and political upheaval of that time thought seriously of the liberation of the slaves, largely for economic reasons. He believed that the country should depend as little as possible on the labor of slaves, knowing that their labor was not sufficiently skillful to furnish the basis for diversified industry. He considered slavery "the great evil under which the nation labors."[1] On another occasion he referred to it as a "portentous evil."[2] and on still another "an evil, moral, political, and economic, a sad blot on our free country."[3] When, therefore, petitions for the abolition of slavery were presented to the legislature of Virginia, he did not frown upon the proposal as a mischievous agitation as did so many others. Madison looked forward to the eventual extermination of slavery through gradual methods of preparation for emancipation. Feeling that the thorough incorporation of the blacks into the community of whites would be prejudicial to the interests of the country, he had no other thought than that of deportation as a correlative of emancipation. Along with a number of others he discussed the proposal to set apart certain western public lands for the transplantation of the blacks from the slave holding States to free soil, but as the white man by his pioneering efforts so rapidly pushed the frontier to the west as to convince the country of the need of that territory for expansion, Madison soon receded from this posi-

[1] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 138.

[2] *Ibid.*, 170.

[3] *Ibid.*, 239.

tion and advocated along with most of the leading men of his time the colonization of the Negroes in Africa.

Madison did not feel that there was any sure ground upon which Congress might participate in the emancipation and the colonization of the Negroes. He suggested that the constitution be amended. He even doubted that the Ordinance of 1787, enacted without authority, had the effect of the emancipation of the slaves and was finally of the opinion that the right of Congress to prohibit slavery in any territory during its territorial period, "depends on the clause in the constitution specially providing for the management of these subordinate establishments."[4] He was rather of the opinion that the restriction was not within the true scope of the constitution. Like Jefferson, therefore, during the later years of his life, Madison saw many difficulties in the way of abolishing slavery. He gave a sympathetic ear to the experiences of the Moravians, Hermonites, and the Shakers, but although he had to concede that slavery impaired the influence of the political example of the United States and was a blot on our republican character, he never became what we could call an abolitionist for the reason that he found it difficult to remove the Negroes from the country when freed. That being the case, he noted with some interest the increase of the slave population, the increase in voluntary emancipation, and the progress of the Colonization Society, to the presidency of which he was elected.[4]

TO ROBERT PLEASANTS

PHILADELPHIA, October 30, 1791

Sir,—The delay in acknowledging your letter of the 6th June last proceeded from the cause you conjectured. I did not receive it till a few days ago, when it was put into my hands by Mr. James Pemberton, along with your subsequent letter of the 8th August.

The petition relating to the Militia bill contains nothing that makes it improper for me to present it. I shall, therefore, readily comply with your desire on that subject. I am not satisfied that

[4] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 168.

I am equally at liberty with respect to the other petition. Animadversions such as it contains, and which the authorized object of the petitioners did not require, on the slavery existing in our country, are supposed by the holders of that species of property to lessen the value by weakening the tenure of it. Those from whom I derive my public station are known by me to be greatly interested in that species of property, and to view the matter in that light. It would seem that I might be chargeable at least with want of candour, if not of fidelity, were I to make use of a situation in which their confidence has placed me to become a volunteer in giving a public wound, as they would deem it, to an interest on which they set so great a value. I am the less inclined to disregard this scruple as I am not sensible that the event of the petition would in the least depend on the circumstance of its being laid before the House by this or that person.

Such an application as that to our own Assembly, on which you ask my opinion, is a subject, in various respects, of great delicacy and importance. The consequences of every sort ought to be well weighed by those who would hazard it. From the view under which they present themselves to me, I cannot but consider the application as likely to do harm rather than good. It may be worth your own consideration whether it might not produce successful attempts to withdraw the privilege now allowed to individuals, of giving freedom to slaves. It would at least be likely to clog it with a condition that the person freed should be removed from the country; there being arguments of great force for such a regulation, and some would concur in it, who, in general, disapprove of the institution of slavery.

I thank you, sir, for the friendly sentiments you have expressed towards me, and am, with respect, your obt, humble servt.[5]

TO ROBERT WALSH[6]

MONTPELLIER, Mar. 2d, 1819.

Dr Sir,—I received some days ago your letter of Feby 15, in which you intimate your intention to vindicate our Country against misrepresentations propagated abroad, and your desire of information on the subject of negro slavery, of moral character, of religion, and of education in Virginia, as affected by the Revolution, and our public Institutions.

[5] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison,* I, 542–543.
[6] *Ibid.,* III, 121.

The general condition of slaves must be influenced by various causes. Among these are: 1. The ordinary price of food, on which the quality and quantity allowed them will more or less depend. This cause has operated much more unfavorably against them in some quarters than in Virginia. 2. The kinds of labour to be performed, of which the sugar and rice plantations afford elsewhere, and not here, unfavorable examples. 3. The national spirit of their masters, which has been graduated by philosophic writers among the slaveholding Colonies of Europe. 4. The circumstance of conformity or difference in the physical characters of the two classes; such a difference cannot but have a material influence, and is common to all the slaveholding countries within the American hemisphere. Even in those where there are other than black slaves, as Indians and mixed breeds, there is a difference of colour not without its influence. 5. The proportion which the slaves bear to the free part of the community, and especially the greater or smaller numbers in which they belong to individuals.

This last is, perhaps, the most powerful of all the causes deteriorating the condition of the slave, and furnishes the best scale for determining the degree of its hardship.

In reference to the actual condition of slaves in Virginia, it may be confidently stated as better, beyond comparison, than it was before the Revolution. The improvement strikes every one who witnessed their former condition, and attends to their present. They are better fed, better clad, better lodged, and better treated in every respect; insomuch, that what was formerly deemed a moderate treatment, would now be a rigid one, and what formerly a rigid one, would now be denounced by the public feelings. With respect to the great article of food particularly, it is a common remark among those who have visited Europe, that it includes a much greater proportion of the animal ingredient than is attainable by the free labourers even in that quarter of the Globe. As the two great causes of the melioration in the lot of the slaves since the establishment of our Independence, I should set down: 1. The sensibility to human rights, and sympathy with human sufferings, excited and cherished by the discussions preceding, and the spirit of the Institutions growing out of that event. 2. The decreasing proportion which the slaves bear to the individual holders of them; a consequence of the abolition of entails and the rule of primogeniture; and of the equalizing tendency of parental affec-

tion unfettered from all prejudices, as well as from the restrictions of law.

With respect to the moral features of Virginia, it must be observed, that pictures which have been given of them are, to say the least, outrageous caricatures, even when taken from the state of society previous to the Revolution; and that so far as there was any ground or colour for them then, the same cannot be found for them now.

Omitting more minute or less obvious causes, tainting the habits and manners of the people under the Colonial Government, the following offer themselves: 1. The negro slavery chargeable in so great a degree on the very quarter which has furnished most of the libellers. It is well known that during the Colonial dependence of Virginia, repeated attempts were made to stop the importation of slaves, each of which attempts was successively defeated by the foreign negative on the laws, and that one of the first offsprings of independent republican legislation was an act of perpetual prohibition.

. . . . . .

With the exception of slavery, these demoralizing causes have ceased or are wearing out; and even that, as already noticed, has lost no small share of its former character. On the whole, the moral aspect of the State may, at present, be fairly said to bear no unfavorable comparison with the average standard of the other States. It certainly gives the lie to the foreign calumniators whom you propose to arraign.[7]

TO ROBERT J. EVANS (AUTHOR OF THE PIECES PUBLISHED UNDER THE NAME OF BENJAMIN RUSH).

MONTPELLIER, June 15, 1819.

Sir,—I have received your letter of the 3d instant, requesting such hints as may have occurred to me on the subject of an eventual extinguishment of slavery in the United States.

Not doubting the purity of your views, and relying on the discretion by which they will be regulated, I cannot refuse such a compliance as will, at least, manifest my respect for the object of your undertaking.

[7] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 122–124.

A general emancipation of slaves ought to be—1. Gradual. 2. Equitable, and satisfactory to the individual immediately concerned. 3. Consistent with the existing and durable prejudices of the nation.

That it ought, like remedies for other deep-rooted and widespread evils, to be gradual, is so obvious, that there seems to be no difference of opinion on that point.

To be equitable and satisfactory, the consent of both the master and the slave should be obtained. That of the master will require a provision in the plan for compensating a loss of what he held as property, guaranteed by the laws, and recognised by the Constitution. That of the slave, requires that his condition in a state of freedom be preferable, in his own estimation, to his actual one in a state of bondage.

To be consistent with existing and probably unalterable prejudices in the United States, the freed blacks ought to be permanently removed beyond the region occupied by, or allotted to, a white population. The objections to a thorough incorporation of the two people, are, with most of the whites, insuperable; and are admitted by all of them to be very powerful. If the blacks, strongly marked as they are by physical and lasting peculiarities, be retained amid the whites, under the degrading privation of equal rights, political or social, they must be always dissatisfied with their condition, as a change only from one to another species of oppression; always secretly confederating against the ruling and privileged class; and always uncontrolled by some of the most cogent motives to moral and respectable conduct. The character of the free blacks even where their legal condition is least affected by their color, seems to put these truths beyond question. It is material, also, that the removal of the blacks to be a distance precluding the jealousies and hostilities to be apprehended from a neighboring people, stimulated by the contempt known to be entertained for their peculiar features; to say nothing of their vindictive recollections, or the predatory propensities which their state of society might foster. Nor is it fair, in estimating the danger of collisions with the whites, to charge it wholly on the side of the black. There would be reciprocal antipathies doubling the danger.

The colonizing plan on foot has, as far as it extends, a due regard to these requisites; with the additional object of bestowing new blessings, civil and religious, on the quarter of the Globe

most in need of them. The Society proposes to transport to the African coast all free and freed blacks who may be willing to remove thither; to provide by fair means, and, it is understood, with a prospect of success, a suitable territory for their reception; and to initiate them into such an establishment as may gradually and indefinitely expand itself.

The experiment, under this view of it, merits encouragement from all who regard slavery as an evil, who wish to see it diminished and abolished by peaceable and just means, and who have themselves no better mode to propose. Those who have most doubted the success of the experiment must, at least, have wished to find themselves in an error.

But the views of the Society are limited to the case of blacks, already free, or who may be *gratuitously* emancipated. To provide a commensurate remedy for the evil, the plan must be extended to the great mass of blacks, and must embrace a fund sufficient to induce the master, as well as the slave, to concur in it. Without the concurrence of the master, the benefit will be very limited as it relates to the negroes, and essentially defective as it relates to the United States; and the concurrence of masters must, for the most part, be obtained by purchase.

Can it be hoped that voluntary contributions, however adequate to an auspicious commencement, will supply the sums necessary to such an enlargement of the remedy? May not another question be asked? Would it be reasonable to throw so great a burden on the individuals distinguished by their philanthropy and patriotism?

The object to be obtained, as an object of humanity, appeals alike to all; as a national object, it claims the interposition of the nation. It is the nation which is to reap the benefit. The nation, therefore, ought to bear the burden.

Must, then, the enormous sums required to pay for, to transport, and to establish in a foreign land, all the slaves in the United States, as their masters may be willing to part with them, be taxed on the good people of the United States, or be obtained by loans, swelling the public debt to a size pregnant with evils next in degree to those of slavery itself?

Happily, it is not necessary to answer this question by remarking, that if slavery, as a national evil, is to be abolished, and it be just that it be done at the national expense, the amount of the expense is not a paramount consideration. It is the peculiar for-

tune, or, rather, a providential blessing of the United States, to possess a resource commensurate to this great object, without taxes on the people, or even an increase of the public debt.

I allude to the vacant territory, the extent of which is so vast, and the vendible value of which is so well ascertained.

Supposing the number of slaves to be 1,500,000, and their price to average 400 dollars, the cost of the whole would be 600 millions of dollars. These estimates are probably beyond the fact; and from the number of slaves should be deducted; 1. Those whom their masters would not part with. 2. Those who may be gratuitously set free by their masters. 3. Those acquiring freedom under emancipating regulations of the States. 4. Those preferring slavery where they are to freedom in an African settlement. On the other hand, it is to be noted that the expense of removal and settlement is not included in the estimated sum; and that an increase of the slaves will be going on during the period required for the execution of the plan.

On the whole, the aggregate sum needed may be stated at about six hundred millions of dollars.

This will require 200 millions of acres, at three dollars per acre; or 300 millions at two dollars per acre; a quantity which, though great in itself, is perhaps not a third part of the disposable territory belonging to the United States. And to what object so good, so great, and so glorious, could that peculiar fund of wealth be appropriated? Whilst the sale of territory would, on one hand, be planting one desert with a free and civilized people, it would, on the other, be giving freedom to another people, and filling with them another desert. And if in any instance wrong has been done by our forefathers to people of one colour, by dispossessing them of their soil, what better atonement is now in our power than that of making what is rightfully acquired a source of justice and of blessings to a people of another colour?

As the revolution to be produced in the condition of the negroes must be gradual, it will suffice if the sale of territory keep pace with its progress. For a time, at least, the proceeds would be in advance. In this case, it might be best, after deducting the expense incident to the surveys and sales, to place the surplus in a situation where its increase might correspond with the natural increase of the unpurchased slaves. Should the proceeds at any time fall short of the calls for their application, anticipations might

be made by temporary loans, to be discharged as the land should find a market.

But it is probable that for a considerable period the sales would exceed the calls. Masters would not be willing to strip their plantations and farms of their labourers so rapidly. The slaves themselves connected, as they generally are, by tender ties with others under other masters, would be kept from the list of emigrants by the want of the multiplied consents to be obtained. It is probable, indeed, that for a long time a certain portion of the proceeds might safely continue applicable to the discharge of the debts or to other purposes of the nation, or it might be most convenient, in the outset, to appropriate a certain proportion only of the income from sales to the object in view, leaving the residue otherwise applicable.

Should any plan similar to that I have sketched be deemed eligible in itself, no particular difficulty is foreseen from that portion of the nation, which, with a common interest in the vacant territory, has no interest in slave property. They are too just to wish that a partial sacrifice should be made for the general good, and too well aware that whatever may be the intrinsic character of that description of property, it is one known to the Constitution, and, as such could not be constitutionally taken away without just compensation. That part of the nation has, indeed, shewn a meritorious alacrity in promoting, by pecuniary contributions, the limited scheme for colonizing the blacks, and freeing the nation from the unfortunate stain on it, which justifies the belief that any enlargement of the scheme, if founded on just principles, would find among them its earliest and warmest patrons. It ought to have great weight that the vacant lands in question have, for the most part, been derived from grants of the States holding the slaves to be redeemed and removed by the sale of them.

It is evident, however, that in effectuating a general emancipation of slaves in the mode which has been hinted, difficulties of other sorts would be encountered. The provision for ascertaining the joint consent of the masters and slaves; for guarding against unreasonable valuations of the latter; and for the discrimination of those not proper to be conveyed to a foreign residence, or who ought to remain a charge on masters in whose service they had been disabled or worn out, and for the annual transportation of such numbers, would require the mature deliberations of the national

councils. The measure implies also, the practicability of procuring in Africa an enlargement of the district or districts for receiving the exiles sufficient for so great an augmentation of their numbers.

Perhaps the Legislative provision best adapted to the case would be an incorporation of the Colonizing Society, or the establishment of a similar one, with proper powers, under the appointment and superintendence of the National Executive.

In estimating the difficulties, however, incident to any plan of general emancipation, they ought to be brought into comparison with those inseparable from other plans, and be yielded to or not accordingly to the result of the comparison.

One difficulty presents itself which will probably attend every plan which is to go into effect under the Legislative provisions of the National Government. But whatever may be the effect of existing powers of Congress, the Constitution has pointed out the way in which it can be supplied. And it can hardly be doubted that the requisite powers might readily be procured for attaining the great object in question, in any mode whatever approved by the nation.

If these thoughts can be of any aid in your search of a remedy for the great evil under which the nation labors, you are very welcome to them.[8]

TO TENCH COXE.

MONTPELIER, March 20, 1820.

I am glad to find you still sparing moments for subjects interesting to the public welfare. The remarks on the thorny one to which you refer in the "National Recorder," seem to present the best arrangement for the unfortunate part of our population whose case has enlisted the anxiety of so many benevolent minds, next to that which provides a foreign outlet and location for them. I have long thought that our vacant territory was the resource which, in some mode or other, was most applicable and adequate as a gradual cure for the portentous evil; without, however, being unaware that even that would encounter serious difficulties of different sorts.[9]

[8] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 133–138.

[9] *Ibid.*, III, 170.

TO GENERAL LAFAYETTE.

MONTPELIER, Nov. 25, 1820.

. . . . . .

The subject which ruffles the surface of public affairs most, at present, is furnished by the transmission of the "Territory" of Missouri from a state of nonage to a maturity for self-Government, and for a membership in the Union. Among the questions involved in it, the one most immediately interesting to humanity is the question whether a toleration or prohibition of slavery Westward of the Mississippi would most extend its evils. The human part of the argument against the prohibition turns on the position, that whilst the importation of slaves from abroad is precluded, a diffusion of those in the Country tends at once to meliorate their actual condition, and to facilitate their eventual emancipation. Unfortunately, the subject, which was settled at the last session of Congress by a mutual concession of the parties, is reproduced on the arena by a clause in the Constitution of Missouri, distinguishing between free persons of colour and white persons, and providing that the Legislature of the new State shall exclude from it the former. What will be the issue of the revived discussion is yet to be seen. The case opens the wider field, as the Constitution and laws of the different States are much at variance in the civic character giving to free persons of colour; those of most of the States, not excepting such as have abolished slavery, imposing various disqualifications, which degrade them from the rank and rights of white persons. All these perplexities develope more and more the dreadful fruitfulness of the original sin of the African trade.[10]

TO F. CORBIN

November 26, 1820.

. . . . . .

I do not mean to discuss the question how far *slavery* and *farming* are incompatible. Our opinions agree as to the evil, moral, political, and economical, of the former. I still think, notwithstanding, that under all the disadvantages of slave cultivation, much improvement in it is practicable. Proofs are annually taking place within my own sphere of observation; particularly where slaves are held in small numbers, by good masters and managers. As to the very wealthy proprietors, much less is to be said. But after all,

[10] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 190.

(protesting against any inference of a disposition to undertake the evil of slavery,) is it certain that in giving to your wealth a new investment, you would be altogether freed from the cares and vexations incident to the shape it now has? If converted into paper, you already feel some of the contingencies belonging to it; if into commercial stock, look at the wrecks every where giving warning of the danger. If into large landed property, where there are no slaves, will you cultivate it yourself? Then beware of the difficulty of procuring faithful or complying labourers. Will you dispose of it in leases? Ask those who have made the experiment what sort of tenants are to be found where an ownership of the soil is so attainable. It has been said that America is a country for the poor, not for the rich. There would be more correctness in saying it is the country for both, where the latter have a relish for free government; but, proportionally, more for the former than for the latter.[11]

TO GENERAL LA FAYETTE.

1821.

. . . . . .

The negro slavery is, as you justly complain, a sad blot on our free country, though a very ungracious subject of reproaches from the quarter which has been most lavish of them. No satisfactory plan has yet been devised for taking out the stain. If an asylum could be found in Africa, that would be the appropriate destination for the unhappy race among us. Some are sanguine that the efforts of an existing Colonization Society will accomplish such a provision; but a very partial success seems the most that can be expected. Some other region must, therefore, be found for them as they become free and willing to emigrate. The repugnance of the whites to their continuance among them is founded on prejudices, themselves founded on physical distinctions, which are not likely soon, if ever, to be eradicated. Even in States, Massachusetts for example, which displayed most sympathy with the people of colour on the Missouri question, prohibitions are taking place against their becoming residents. They are every where regarded as a nuisance, and must really be such as long as they are under the degradation which public sentiment inflicts on them. They are at the same time rapidly increasing from manumissions and from offspring, and of course lessening the general disproportion between the slaves and

[11] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 193–194.

the whites. This tendency is favorable to the cause of a universal emancipation."[12]

TO DR. MORSE

March 28, 1823

Queries.

1. Do the planters generally live on their own estates?

2. Does a planter with ten or fifteen slaves employ an overlooker, or does he overlook his slaves himself?

3. Obtain estimates of the culture of Sugar and Cotton, to show what difference it makes where the planter resides on his estate, or where he employs attorneys, overlookers, &c.

4. Is it a common or general practice to mortgage slave estates?

5. Are sales of slave estates very frequent under execution for debt and what proportion of the whole may be thus sold annually?

6. Does the Planter possess the power of selling the different branches of a family separate?

7. When the prices of produce, Cotton Sugar, &c., are high, do the Planters purchase, instead of raising, their corn and other provisions?

8. When the prices of produce are low, do they then raise their own corn and other provisions?

9. Do the negroes fare better when the Corn, &c., is raised upon their master's estate or when he buys it?

10. Do the tobacco planters in America ever buy their own Corn or other food, or do they always raise it?

11. If they always, or mostly, raise it, can any other reason be given for the differences of the system pursued by them and that pursued by the Sugar and Cotton planters than that cultivation of tobacco is less profitable than that of Cotton or Sugar?

12. Do any of the Planters manufacture the packages for their product, or the clothing for their negroes and if they do, are their negroes better clothed than when clothing is purchased?

13. Where, and by whom, is the Cotton bagging of the Brazils made? is it principally made by free men or slaves?

14. Is it the general system to employ the negroes in task work, or by the day?

15. How many hours are they generally at work in the former case? how many in the latter? Which system is generally preferred by the master? which by the slaves?

[12] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 239, 240.

16. Is it common to allow them a certain portion of time instead of their allowance of provisions? In this case, how much is allowed? Where the slaves have the option, which do they generally choose? On which system do the slaves look the best, and acquire the most comforts?

17. Are there many small plantations where the owners possess only a few slaves? What proportion of the whole may be supposed to be held in this way?

18. In such cases, are the slaves treated or almost considered a part of the family?

19. Do the slaves fare best when their situations and that of the master are brought nearest together?

20. In what state are the slaves as to religion or religious instruction?

21. Is it common for the slaves to be regularly married?

22. If a man forms an attachment to a woman on a different or distant plantation, is it the general practice for some accommodation to take place between the owners of the man and woman, so that they may live together?

23. In the United States of America, the slaves are found to increase at about the rate of 3 P cent. P annum. Does the same take place in other places? Give a census, if such is taken. Show what cause contributes to this increase, or what prevents it where it does not take place.

24. Obtain a variety of estimates from the Planters of the cost of bringing up a child, and at what age it becomes a clear gain to its owner.

25. Obtain information respecting the comparative cheapness of cultivation by slaves or by free men.

26. Is it common for the free blacks to labour in the field?

27. Where the labourers consist of free blacks and of white men, what are the relative prices of their labour when employed about the same work?

28. What is the proportion of free blacks and slaves?

29. Is it considered that the increase in the proportion of free blacks to slaves increases or diminishes the danger of insurrection?

30. Are the free blacks employed in the defence of the Country, and do they and the Creoles preclude the necessity of European troops?

31. Do the free blacks appear to consider themselves as more closely connected with the slaves or with the white population?

and in cases of insurrection, with which have they generally taken part?

32. What is their general character with respect to industry and order, as compared with that of the slaves?

33. Are there any instances of emancipation in particular estates, and what is the result?

34. Is there any general plan of emancipation in progress, and what?

35. What was the mode and progress of emancipation in those States in America where slavery has ceased to exist?

Hon. James Madison, Esq.

New Haven, Mar. 14, 1823.

Sir.—The foregoing was transmitted to me from a respectable correspondent in Liverpool, deeply engaged in the abolition of the slave trade, and the amelioration of the condition of slaves. If, sir, your leisure will allow you, and it is agreeable to you to furnish brief answers to these questions, you will, I conceive, essentially serve the cause of humanity, and gratify and oblige the Society above named, and, Sir, with high consideration and esteem, your most obt servt,

JED'H MORSE.

Answers

1. Yes.

2. Employs an overseer for that number of slaves, with few exceptions.

3. ———

4. Not uncommonly the land; sometimes the slaves; very rarely both together.

5. The common law, as in England, governs the relation between land and debts; slaves are often sold under execution for debt; the proportion to the whole cannot be great within a year, and varies, of course, with the amount of debt and the urgency of creditors.

6. Yes.

7–10. Instances are rare where the tobacco planters do not raise their own provisions.

11. The proper comparison, not between the culture of tobacco and that of sugar and cotton, but between each of these cultures and that of provisions. The tobacco planter finds it cheaper to make

them a part of his crop than to buy them. The cotton and sugar planters to buy them, where this is the case, than to raise them. The term, cheaper, embraces the comparative facility and certainty of procuring the supplies.

12. Generally best clothed when from the household manufactures, which are increasing.

14, 15. Slaves seldom employed in regular task work. They prefer it only when rewarded with the surplus time gained by their industry.

16. Not the practice to substitute an allowance of time for the allowance of provisions.

17. Very many, and increasing with the progressive subdivisions of property; the proportion cannot be stated.

18, 19. The fewer the slaves, and the fewer the holders of slaves, the greater the indulgence and familiarity. In districts composing (comprising?) large masses of slaves there is no difference in their condition, whether held in small or large numbers, beyond the difference in the dispositions of the owners, and the greater strictness of attention where the number is greater.

26. There is no general system of religious instruction. There are few spots where religious worship is not within reach, and to which they do not resort. Many are regular members of Congregations, chiefly Baptist; and some Preachers also, though rarely able to read.

21. Not common; but the instances are increasing.

22. The accommodation not unfrequent where the plantations are very distant. The slaves prefer wives on a different plantation, as affording occasions and pretexts for going abroad, and exempting them on holidays from a share of the little calls to which those at home are liable.

23. The remarkable increase of slaves, as shown by the census, results from the comparative defect of moral and prudential restraint on the sexual connexion; and from the absence, at the same time, of that counteracting licentiousness of intercourse, of which the worst examples are to be traced where the African trade, as in the West Indies, kept the number of females less than of the males.

24. The annual expense of food and raiment in rearing a child may be stated at about 8, 9, or 10 dollars; and the age at which it begins to be gainful to its owner about 9 or 10 years.

25. The practice here does not furnish data for a comparison of cheapness between thes two modes of cultivation.

26. They are sometimes hired for field labour in time of harvest, and on other particular occasions.

27. The examples are too few to have established any such relative prices.

28. See the census.

29. Rather increases.

30. ————

31. More closely with the slaves, and more likely to side with them in a case of insurrection.

32. Generally idle and depraved; appearing to retain the bad qualities of the slaves, with whom they continue to associate, without acquiring any of the good ones of the whites, from whom (they) continued separated by prejudices against their colour, and other peculiarities.

33. There are occasional instances in the present legal condition of leaving the State.

34. None.

35. ————[13]

To MISS FRANCES WRIGHT

MONTPELLIER, Sept. 1, 1825.

Dear Madam,—Your letter to Mrs. Madison, containing observations addressed to my attention also, came duly to hand, as you will learn from her, with a printed copy of your plan for the gradual abolition of slavery in the United States.

The magnitude of this evil among us is so deeply felt, and so universally acknowledged, that no merit could be greater than that of devising a satisfactory remedy for it. Unfortunately the task, not easy under other circumstances, is vastly augmented by the physical peculiarities[14] of those held in bondage, which preclude their incorporation with the white population; and by the blank in the general field of labour to be occasioned by their exile; a blank into which there would not be an influx of white labourers, successively taking the place of the exiles, and which, without such an influx, would have an effect distressing in prospect to the proprietors of the soil.

[13] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison,* III, 310–315.

[14] These peculiarities, it would seem, are not of equal force in the South American States, owing, in part, perhaps, to a former degradation, produced by colonial vassalage; but principally to the lesser contrast of colours. The difference is not striking between that of many of the Spanish and Portuguese Creoles and that of many of the mixed breed.—J. M.

The remedy for the evil which you have planned is certainly recommended to favorable attention by the two characteristics: 1. That it requires the voluntary concurrence of the holders of the slaves, with or without pecuniary compensation. 2. That it contemplates the removal of those emancipated, either to a foreign or distant region. And it will still further obviate objections, if the experimental establishments should avoid the neighborhood of settlements where there are slaves.

Supposing these conditions to be duly provided for, particularly the removal of the emancipated blacks, the remaining questions relate to the attitude and adequacy of the process by which the slaves are at the same time to earn the funds, entire or supplemental, required for their emancipation and removal; and to be sufficiently educated for a life of freedom and of social order.

With respect to a proper course of education, no serious difficulties present themselves. And as they are to continue in a state of bondage during the preparatory period, and to be within the jurisdiction of States recognizing ample authority over them, a competent discipline cannot be impracticable. The degree in which this discipline will enforce the needed labour, and in which a voluntary industry will supply the defect of compulsory labour, are vital points, on which it may not be safe to be very positive without some light from actual experiment.

Considering the probable composition of the labourers, and the known fact that, where the labour is compulsory the greater the number of labourers brought together (unless, indeed, where cooperation of many hands is rendered essential by a particular kind of work, or of machinery) the less are the proportional profits, it may be doubted whether the surplus from that source merely, beyond the support of the establishment would sufficiently accumulate in five, or even more years, for the objects in view. And candor obliges me to say that I am not satisfied either that the prospect of emancipation at a future day will sufficiently overcome the natural and habitual repugnance to labour, or that there is such an advantage of united over individual labour as is taken for granted.

In cases where portions of time have been allowed to slaves, as among the Spaniards, with a view to their working out their freedom, it is believed that but few have availed themselves of the opportunity by a voluntary industry; and such a result could be less relied on in a case where each individual would feel that the

fruit of his exertions would be shared by others, whether equally or unequally making them, and that the exertions of others would equally avail him, notwithstanding a deficiency in his own. Skilful arrangements might palliate this tendency, but it would be difficult to counteract it effectually.[15]

The examples of the Moravians, the Harmonites, and the Shakers, in which the united labours of many for a common object have been successful have, no doubt, an imposing character. But it must be recollected that in all these establishments there is a religious impulse in the members of a religious authority in the head, for which there will be no substitutes of equivalent efficacy in the emancipating establishment. The code of rules by which Mr. Rapp manages his conscientious and devoted flock, and enriches a common treasury, must be little applicable to the dissimilar assemblage in question. His experience may afford valuable aid in its general organization, and in the distribution and details of the work to be performed. But an efficient administration must, as is judiciously proposed, be in hands practically acquainted with the propensities and habits of the members of the new community.

With reference to this dissimilarity, and to the doubt as to the advantages of associated labour, it may deserve consideration whether the experiment would not be better commenced on a scale smaller than that assumed in the prospectus. A less expensive outfit would suffice; labourers in the proper proportions of sex and age would be more attainable; the necessary discipline and the direction of their labours could be more simple and manageable; and but little time would be lost; or, perhaps, time gained; as success, for which the chance would, according to my calculation, be increased, would give an encouraging aspect, to the plan, and probably suggest improvements better qualifying it for the larger scale proposed.

Such, Madam, are the general ideas suggested by your interesting communication. If they do not coincide with yours, and imply less of confidence than may be due to the plan you have formed, I hope you will not question either my admiration of the generous philanthropy which dictated it, or my sense of the special regard it evinces for the honor and welfare of our expanding, and, I trust, rising Republic.

As it is not certain what construction would be put on the view

[15] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 495–498.

I have taken of the subject, I leave it with your discretion to withhold it altogether, or to disclose it within the limits you allude to; intimating only that it will be most agreeable to me, on all occasions, not to be brought before the public where there is no obvious call for it.

Writing to General Lafayette in 1826, Madison commented thus on the proposal of Miss Frances Wright for the uplift of Negroes.

You possess, notwithstanding your distance, better information concerning Miss Wright, and her experiment, than we do here. We learn only that she has chosen for it a remote spot in the western part of Tennessee, and has commenced her enterprise; but with what prospects we know not. Her plan contemplated a provision for the expatriation of her Elèves, but without specifying it; from which I infer the difficulty felt in devising a satisfactory one. Could this part of the plan be ensured, the other essential part would come about of itself. Manumissions now more than keep pace with the outlets provided, and the increase of them is checked only by their remaining in the Country. This obstacle removed, and all others would yield to the emancipating disposition. To say nothing of partial modes, what would be more simple, with the requisite grant of power to Congress, than to purchase all female infants at their birth, leaving them in the service of the holder to a reasonable age, on condition of their receiving an elementary education? The annual number of female births may be stated at twenty thousand, and the cost at less than one hundred dollars each, at the most; a sum which would not be felt by the nation, and be even within the compass of State resources. But no such effort would be listened to, whilst the impression remains, and it seems to be indelible, that the two races cannot co-exist, both being free and equal. The great *sine qua non*, therefore, is some external asylum for the coloured race. In the mean time, the taunts to which this misfortune exposes us in Europe are the more to be deplored, because it impairs the influence of our political example; though they come with an ill grace from the quarter most lavish of them, the quarter which obtruded the evil, and which has but lately become a penitent, under suspicious appearances.[16]

[16] *Letters and other Writings of James Medison*, III, 541–542.

TO JOSEPH C. CABELL

MONTPELLIER, January 5, 1829.

Dear Sir,—I have received yours of December 28, in which you wish me to say something of the agitated subject of the basis of representation in the contemplated convention for revising the State Constitution. In a case depending so much on local views and feelings, and perhaps on the opinions of leading individuals, and in which a mixture of compromises with abstract principles may be resorted to, your judgment, formed on the theatre affording the best means of information, must be more capable of aiding mine than mine yours.

What occurs to me is, that the great principle "that man cannot be justly bound by laws, in making which they have no share," consecrated as it is by our Revolution and the Bill of Rights, and sanctioned by examples around us, is so engraven on the public mind here, that it ought to have a preponderating influence in all questions involved in the mode of forming a convention, and in discharging the trust committed to it when formed. It is said that west of the Blue Ridge the votes of non-freeholders are often connived at, the candidates finding it unpopular to object to them.

With respect to the slaves, they cannot be admitted as *persons* into the representation, and probably will not be allowed any claim as a *privileged* property. As the difficulty and disquietude on that subject arise mainly from the great inequality of slaves in the geographical division of the country, it is fortunate that the cause will abate as they become more diffused, which is already taking place; transfers of them from the quarters where they abound, to those where labourers are more wanted being a matter of course.

Is there, then, to be no constitutional provision for the rights of property, when added to the personal rights of the holders, against the will of a majority having little or no direct interest in the rights of property? If any such provision be attainable beyond the moral influence which property adds to political rights, it will be most secure and permanent if made by a convention chosen by a general suffrage, and more likely to be so made now than at a future stage of population. If made by a freehold convention in favour of freeholders, it would be less likely to be acquiesced in permanently,[17]

[17] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, III, 2–3.

TO GENERAL LA FAYETTE

Feb. 1, 1830.

. . . . . .

Your anticipation with regard to the slavery among us were the natural offspring of your just principles and laudable sympathies; but I am sorry to say that the occasion which led to them proved to be little fitted for the slightest interposition on that subject. A sensibility, morbid in the highest degree, was never more awakened among those who have the largest stake in that species of interest, and the most violent against any governmental movement in relation to it. The excitability at the moment, happened, also, to be not a little augmented by party questions between the South and the North, and the efforts used to make the circumstance common to the former a sympathetic bond of co-operation. I scarcely express myself too strongly in saying that any allusion in the Convention to the subject you have so much at heart would have been a spark to a mass of gunpowder. It is certain, nevertheless, that time, the great "Innovator," is not idle in its salutary preparations. The Colonization Society are becoming more and more one of its agents. Outlets for the freed blacks are alone wanted for a rapid erasure of the blot from our Republican character.[18]

TO ——— ———

June 28, 1831.

But the title in the people of the United States rests on a foundation too just and solid to be shaken by any technical or metaphysical arguments whatever. The known and acknowledged intentions of the parties at the time, with a prescriptive sanction of so many years consecrated by the intrinsic principles of equity, would overrule even the most explicit declarations and terms, as has been done without the aid of that principle in the slaves, who remain such in spite of the declarations that all men are born equally free.[19]

TO MATTHEW CAREY

MONTPELIER, July 7, 1831.

. . . . . .

If the States cannot live together in harmony under the auspices of such a Government as exists, and in the midst of blessings such

[18] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, IV, 60.

[19] *Ibid.*, IV, 188.

as have been the fruits of it, what is the prospect threatened by the abolition of a common Government, with all the rivalships, collisions and animosities inseparable from such an event? The entanglements and conflicts of commercial regulations, especially as affecting the inland and other non-importing States, and a protection of fugitive slaves substituted for the obligatory surrender of them, would, of themselves, quickly kindle the passions which are the forerunners of war.[20]

To R. R. Gurley, a promoter of colonization, Madison wrote the following December 28, 1831:

Dear Sir,—I received in due time your letter of the 21 ultimo, and with due sensibility to the subject of it. Such, however, has been the effect of a painful rheumatism on my general condition, as well as in disqualifying my fingers for the use of the pen, that I could not do justice "to the principles and measures of the Colonization Society, in all the great and various relations they sustain in our country and to Africa." If my views of them could have the value which your partiality supposes, I may observe, in brief, that the Society had always my good wishes, though with hopes of its success less sanguine than were entertained by others found to have been the better judges; and that I feel the greatest pleasure at the progress already made by the Society, and the encouragement to encounter the remaining difficulties afforded by the earlier and greater ones already overcome. Many circumstances at the present moment seem to concur in brightening the prospects of the Society, and cherishing the hope that the time will come when the *dreadful calamity which has so long afflicted our country, and filled so many with despair, will be gradually removed, and by means consistent with justice, peace, and the general satisfaction; thus giving to our country the full enjoyment of the blessings of liberty, and to the world the full benefit of its great example.* I have never considered the main difficulty of the great work as lying in the deficiency of emancipations, but in an inadequacy of asylums for such a growing mass of population, and in the great expense of removing it to its new home. The spirit of private maunmission, as the laws may permit and the exiles may consent, is increasing, and will increase, and there are sufficient indications that the public authorities in slaveholding States are

[20] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison,* IV, 192.

looking forward to interpretations, in different forms, that must have a powerful effect.

With respect to the new abode for the emigrants, all agree that the choice made by the Society is rendered peculiarly appropriate by considerations which need not be repeated, and if other situations should not be found as eligible receptacles for a portion of them, the prospect in Africa seems to be expanding in a highly encouraging degree.

In contemplating the pecuniary resources needed for the removal of such a number to so great a distance, my thought and hopes have long been turned to the rich fund presented in the western lands of the nation, which will soon entirely cease to be under a pledge for another object. The great one in question is truly of a national character, and it is known that distinguished patriots not dwelling in slaveholding States have viewed the object in that light, and would be willing to let the national domain be a resource in effectuating it.

Should it be remarked that the States, although all may be interested in relieving our country from the coloured population, are not equally so, it is but fair to recollect that the sections most to be benefited are those whose cessions created the fund to be disposed of.

I am aware of the constitutional obstacle which has presented itself; but if the general will be reconciled to an application of the territorial fund to the removal of the coloured population, a grant to Congress of the necessary authority could be carried with little delay through the forms of the Constitution.

Sincerely wishing increasing success to the labours of the Society, I pray you to be assured of my esteem, and to accept my friendly salutations.[21]

TO THOMAS R. DREW

MONTPELLIER, Feby 23, 1833

Dear Sir,—I received, in due time, your letter of the 15th ult. with copies of the two pamphlets; one on the "Restrictive System," the other on the "Slave Question."

The former I have not yet been able to look into, and in reading the latter with the proper attention I have been much retarded by many interruptions, as well as by the feebleness incident to my

[21] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison,* IV, 213–214.

great age, increased as it is by the effects of an acute fever, preceded and followed by a chronic complaint under which I am still labouring. This explanation of the delay in acknowledging your favor will be an apology, also, for the brevity and generality of the answer. For the freedom of it, none, I am sure, will be required. In the views of the subject taken in the pamphlet, I have found much valuable and interesting information, with ample proof of the numerous obstacles to a removal of slavery from our country, and everything that could be offered in mitigation of its continuance; but I am obliged to say, that in not a few of the data from which you reason, and in the conclusion to which you are led, I cannot concur.

I am aware of the impracticability of an immediate or early execution of any plan that combines deportation with emancipation, and of the inadmissibility of emancipation without deportation. But I have yielded to the expediency of attempting a gradual remedy, by providing for the double operation.

If emancipation was the sole object, the extinguishment of slavery would be easy, cheap, and complete. The purchase by the public of all female children, at their birth, leaving them in bondage till it would defray the charge of rearing them, would, within a limited period, be a radical resort.

With the condition of deportation it has appeared to me, that the great difficulty does not lie either in the expense of emancipation, or in the expense or the means of deportation, but in the attainment—1, of the requisite asylums; 2, the consent of the individuals to be removed; 3, the labour for the vacuum to be created.

With regard to the expense—1, much will be saved by voluntary emancipations, increasing under the influence of example, and the prospect of bettering the lot of the slaves; 2, much may be expected in gifts and legacies from the opulent, the philanthropic, and the conscientious; 3, more still from legislative grants by the States, of which encouraging examples and indications have already appeared; 4, nor is there any room for despair of aid from the indirect or direct proceeds of the public lands held in trust by Congress. With a sufficiency of pecuniary means, the facility of providing a naval transportation of the exiles is shewn by the present amount of our tonnage and the promptitude with which it can be enlarged; by the number of emigrants brought from

Europe to N. America within the last year, and by the greater number of slaves which have been, within single years, brought from the coast of Africa across the Atlantic.

In the attainment of adequate asylums, the difficulty, though it may be considerable, is far from being discouraging. Africa is justly the favorite choice of the patrons of colonization; and the prospect there is flattering—1, in the territory already acquired; 2, in the extent of coast yet to be explored, and which may be equally convenient; 3, the adjacent interior into which the littoral settlements can be expanded under the auspices of physical afinities between the new comers and the natives, and of the moral superiorities of the former; 4, the great inland regions now ascertained to be accessible by navigable waters, and opening new fields for colonizing enterprises.

But Africa, though the primary, is not the sole asylum within contemplation; an auxiliary one presents itself in the islands adjoining this continent, where the coloured population is already dominant, and where the wheel of revolution may from time to time produce the like result.

Nor ought another contingent receptable for emancipated slaves to be altogether overlooked. It exists within the territory under the control of the United States, and is not too distant to be out of reach, whilst sufficiently distant to avoid, for an indefiite period, the collisions to be apprehended from the vicinity of people distinguished from each other by physical as well as other characteristics.

The consent of the individuals is another pre-requisite in the plan of removal. At present there is a known repugnance in those already in a state of freedom to leave their native homes, and among the slaves there is an almost universal preference of their present condition to freedom in a distant and unknown land. But in both classes, particularly that of the slaves, the prejudices arise from a distrust of the favorable accounts coming to them through white channels. By degrees truth will find its way to them from sources in which they will confide, and their aversion to removal may be overcome as fast as the means of effectuating it shall accrue.

The difficulty of replacing the labour withdrawn by a removal of the slaves, seems to be urged as of itself an insuperable objection to the attempt. The answer to it is—1, that notwithstanding the emigrations of the whites, there will be an annual and by degrees

an increasing surplus of the remaining mass; 2, that there will be an attraction of whites from without, increasing with the demand, and, as the population elsewhere will be yielding a surplus to be attracted; 3, that as the culture of tobacco declines with the contraction of the space within which it is profitable and still more from the successful competition in the West, and as the farming system takes the place of planting, a portion of labour can be spared without impairing the requisite stock; 4, that although the process must be slow, be attended with much inconvenience, and be not even certain in its result, is it not preferable to a torpid acquiescence in a perpetuation of slavery, or an extinguishment of it by convulsions more disastrous in their character and consequences than slavery itself?

In my estimate of the experiment instituted by the Colonization Society, I may indulge too much my wishes and hopes, to be safe from errors. But a partial success will have its virtue, and an entire failure will leave behind a consciousness of the laudable intentions with which relief from the greatest of our calamities was attempted in the only mode presenting a chance of effecting it.

I hope I shall be pardoned for remarking, that in accounting for the depressed condition of Virginia, you seem to allow too little to the existence of slavery, ascribe too much to the tariff laws, and not to have sufficiently taken into view the effect of the rapid settlement of the Western and Southwestern country.

Previous to the Revolution, when, of these causes, slavery alone was in operation, the face of Virginia was, in every feature of improvement and prosperity, a contrast to the Colonies where slavery did not exist, or in a degree only, not worthy of notice. Again, during the period of the tariff laws prior to the latter state of them, the pressure was little, if at all, regarded as a source of the general suffering. And whatever may be the degree in which the extravagant augmentation of the Tariff may have contributed to the depression, the extent of this cannot be explained by the extent of the cause. The great and adequate cause of the evil is the cause last mentioned, if that be indeed an evil which improves the condition of our migrating citizens, and adds more to the growth and prosperity of the whole than it subtracts from a part of the community.

Nothing is more certain than that the actual and prospective depression of Virginia is to be referred to the fall in the value

of her landed property, and in that of the staple products of the land. And it is not less certain that the fall in both cases is the inevitable effect of the redundancy in the market of land and of its products. The vast amount of fertile land offered at 125 cents per acre in the West and S. West could not fail to have the effect already experienced, of reducing the land here to half its value; and when the labour that will here produce one hogshead of tobacco and ten barrels of flour will there produce two hhd and twenty barrels, now so cheaply transportable to the destined outlets, a like effect on these articles must necessarily ensue. Already more tobacco is sent to New Orleans than is exported from Virginia to foreign markets; whilst the article of flour, exceeding for the most part the demand for it, is in a course of rapid increase from new sources as boundless as they are productive. The great staples of Virginia have but a limited market, which is easily glutted. They have in fact sunk more in price, and have a more threatening prospect, than the more southern staples of cotton and rice. The case is believed to be the same with her landed property. That it is so with her slaves is proved by the purchases made here for the market there.

The reflections suggested by this aspect of things will be more appropriate in your hands than in mine. They are also beyond the tether of my subject, which I fear I have already overstrained. I hasten, therefore, to conclude, with a tender of the high respect and cordial regards which I pray you to accept.[22]

TO HENRY CLAY

June, 1833.

It is painful to observe the unceasing efforts to alarm the South by imputations against the North of unconstitutional designs on the subject of the slaves. You are right, I have no doubt, in believing that no such intermeddling disposition exists in the body of our Northern brethren. Their good faith is sufficiently guarantied by the interest they have as merchants, as ship-owners, and as manufacturers, in preserving a union with the slaveholding States. On the other hand, what *madness* in the South to look for greater safety in disunion. It would be worse than jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire; it would be jumping into the

[22] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison*, IV, 274–279.

fire for fear of the frying-pan. The danger from the alarm is, that the pride and resentment exerted by them may be an overmatch for the dictates of prudence, and favor the project of a Southern Convention, insidiously revived, as promising, by its councils, the best securities against grievances of every sort from the North.[23]

[23] *Letters and other Writings of James Madison,* IV, 301.